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John Allen Chalk

10-22-1970

From/To: Richard Hall (Chalk's reply filed first)

Richard Hall

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October 22, 1970

Mr. Richard Hall
Church of Christ
Seventh and Broadway
Okemah, Oklahoma 745859

Dear Richard:

I can identify completely with your most recent letter. The concerns you feel are understandable and I think basic. The anxiety you are experiencing regarding the institutional church is a thing that hundreds of concerned Christians are going through right now. One of my principle sources of continual frustration is the fact that so many of us continue to listen to the "chief priests" as you call them. When we no longer listen to them and when enough of us follow our own basic convictions, regardless of what the chief priests say, their influence will be nullified. Until that time we almost, as it were, increase their stature by even being concerned about them.

On the question of the inspiration and authority of the Bible, I think you will find the following two books very helpful: Carl F. H. Henry, Revelation and the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958); Robert H. Bryant, The Bible's Authority Today (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968). Bryant's book has been of special help to me. It is a recent book, as the date indicates, and puts the central issues in clear focus in my judgment.

The question regarding the restoration movement is settled when one comes to his own decision about the ultimate authority and sovereignty of Jesus Christ. When one remembers that the source of final authority and the source from which all Biblical truth comes is the God who reveals Himself, and specifically reveals Himself in Jesus Christ, one is able to see that it is not a "paper god" to which we are related, but rather the living relationship with a real being described clearly in the Bible. Our being related again to God is what the Bible is all about, rather than being some kind of code book or set of complicated rules. One of the most succinct chapters to show the authority of Jesus Christ and the derived authority of the Bible out of the authority of Jesus Christ is the first chapter in a paper-back book ~~book~~ by Henlee H. Barnett, Crucial Problems in Christian Perspective, published in Philadelphia by the Westminster Press, 1970. This first chapter on "moral authority" is a succinct statement regarding the authority for Christian ethics and, therefore, speaks to the more general question of authority.

There is no way, Richard, that I can be a member of the denominational Church of Christ. I am responsive to the call of God in Christ so that my response makes me a member of Christ's body, which in the New Testament sense is almost always a local group of believers. My relationship to the body of Christ is principally seen in the connection that I have with the Highland congregation and not with eighteen thousand congregations around the world. There is no way I can support, there is no way I can defend, and no way I can maintain a gigantic denominational structure, however loosely tied together it may be. The reason we have "chief priests" among us is that we are attempting to maintain the church's existence and giving our basic attention to the subject of the church only at a denominational and unBiblical level. When once again we begin to see that Christ is a real person who personally relates us to God so that we come into a genuine inter-personal relationship with our fellow brothers and sisters, we will begin to see that the church is not an institution but in every sense of the word a "body."

Let me know how these thoughts strike you and feel free to write any time you desire.

Your brother,

John Allen Chalk

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October 14, 1970

*Carl F. H. Brown
Rev. of the Bible
1958 - Golden Book Home*

Mr. John Allen Chalk
Preacher
Highland Church of Christ
South Fifth and Highland
Abilene, Texas 79605

*Robert H. Bryant
The Bible's Authority Today
Angshury Pub. House, 1968*

Dear John Allen,

I know that you are pressed from every side, but I feel the need to write you. Because of our correspondence I feel very close to you and must confess that I feel enough security only in you and one other man to pour out my thoughts to you.

I have gone farther in my thinking than I ever thought I would, should, or could. I cannot hold to what Guy N. Woods likes to call, "the Cardinal Doctrines of the Restoration Movement." To me what they come down to is, that a man will be lost, if he does not obey them, no matter how sincere and Christlike he is. I do not believe a Christlike man will be lost just because he did not know he was to be baptized or that he was to sing without an organ. One part of me rebels against this thinking, but I just can't find this kind of teaching in the Bible. To me, we in the Church of Christ have just exchanged Old Law Legalism for "New Law Legalism." Am I wrong in my change of thinking? Will people be lost if I don't preach our doctrines? What is the aim of Christianity; obedient slaves to a prison of rules, or good people restored to the Image of God?

Could you recommend some books of the Inspiration of the Bible? I am confused about this.

It is tempting sometimes to quit preaching and do something else. Sometimes I feel like doing this and quitting all institutional Churches, and roaming all through all the Churches learn from all the viewpoints, but not get involved in their politics. I must confess that as a preacher I fear the future. I'm not sure there is a place for me in the Church of Christ anymore. What does the Lord want me to do? What can we do to shut our "Chief Priests" up?

When you get time I would appreciate your thoughts and advice. Do it at your leisure. I don't want to impose. God's blessings be upon you.

Sincerely,

Richard Hall
Richard Hall